



THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOMELESS  
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# AN ANECDOTE

- Homelessness is confronting.
- It is complex
- It is everywhere



# TERMINOLOGY

- We are ‘Street Law’ but we don’t call ourselves ‘street lawyers’.
- The reality is, we don’t spend much time ‘on the street’.
- We generally see clients at pre-arranged venues, but ‘Pre-Arranged Venue Law’ doesn’t quite have the same ring to it.
- We don’t say ‘homeless’ any more, we say ‘experiencing homelessness’



# WHAT WE DO

- It's difficult to reach out.
- We do several scheduled outreaches
- Some unscheduled
- We'd like to connect by Skype or other modern means if possible rather than lose the moment, and that may work well especially for younger people.
- The practical reality is that it's easier to see people in our office because we have access to our database
- Also easier for confidentiality



# WHO WE ARE

- We are currently a team of 4 lawyers plus interns, secondees, students and volunteers
- Pro bono support is invaluable
- Nearly 10 years!
- Next year we'll be having cake...



# OLD TERMS, OLD ATTITUDES

- Loitering
- Vagabond
- Vagrant
- ‘idle and disorderly person, rogue and vagabond, or incorrigible rogue’ – Vagrancy Act 1902 (NSW)
- There used to be vagrancy acts around the country



# OUR CLIENTS

- No home, or no secure housing
- No privacy, storage
- No ID – (but you can get it if you have photo ID!)
- Limited/no access to services
- Usually a whole lot of legal and personal baggage and no easy way to deal with it
- No easy way to access shower/laundry
- Probably no employment or no ‘regular’ employment & often exploited



# OUR CLIENTS

- Mental health issues create a range of roadblocks and challenges.
- Usually some type of trauma in their background
- Disability
- Domestic violence
- May be anywhere from PhD to very low literacy





# THE CHALLENGES FOR US

- People have often lost relevant documents
- People may not be where you want them to be when you want them to be.
- When they're ready to talk, you may have another client.
- When we're ready to talk to them, they may not be contactable
- We try as far as possible to be flexible and accommodating
- Very often we drop everything to help clients
- No phone, (or no credit) no address (surprise surprise!)



# THE CHALLENGES FOR US CONT...

- Multiple, complex legal issues
- Some urgent
- Some festering and getting worse
- Some well and truly past their limitation period
- Managing client expectations
- Gaining trust



# DEALING WITH THINGS PROMPTLY

- Limiting legal services is a false economy
- If we can get to matters quickly, they can often be resolved
- Example - 'Jane' – a \$600 mobile phone debt from a few years back
- Unpaid, re-financed, interest, penalties etc
- By the time she saw us it was a \$24,000 debt...



# THE FUTURE

- Homelessness unfortunately appears to have an unstoppable future and shows no signs of abating
- Maybe AI will change our work. I look forward to anything that makes our work more streamlined, but I can't help but think that desperate people will still need people.



# OTHER FREE LEGAL SERVICES IN THE ACT

